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The Modern Language Journal

VOLUME III

MARCH, 1919

No. 6

ITALIAN IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS¹

Despite our awakened interest in the affairs of Italy, the Italian language is still taught in only a few of our secondary schools. This situation is the more remarkable in view of the fact that the large Italian population in the United States is rapidly increasing in prosperity, and consequently in ability to patronize the schools.

Manifesting a spirit in marked contrast with that of the pan-Germans, the Italians in the United States have generally been eager to learn English as rapidly as possible, and have prided themselves on their Americanism. That they have at the same time not lost their natural love for their beautiful native land is evidenced by their early response to the appeal of the Rome government for troops to fight the Austrian oppressor. The *Navigazione Generale Italiana* and other lines took back hordes of Italian "richiamati," who returned enthusiastically to defend their sacred soil, cheering with Italian lustiness every American flag which they passed on the way.

We have therefore a splendid nucleus for the study of Italian in our schools. In a few of our schools, Italian is already taught. In New York, classes in Italian have been organized with some success in the last year or two. In Boston, the Hancock School, located on Parmenter Street, has 206 pupils in Italian. In the Boston Central Evening High School, there is a class in Italian with about 25 pupils in attendance. Italian is also taught in schools for emigrants in a number of cities, and for the social worker a knowledge of Italian is almost indispensable.

Nevertheless, the rightful place for Italian is not in the grade schools, where the time allotted for English is already too short.

¹Address delivered before the Illinois High School Conference, held at Urbana Ill., Nov. 22, 1918]

It should be taught in the day high schools, and there the provision for it is altogether inadequate. In fact, even in a great majority of our universities and colleges, Italian is regarded at best as a sort of tail for the French kite. It will be a calamity if the war does not open our eyes to the importance of the language of the country which is, after France, our chief ally on the continent of Europe.

Italian should be studied, not only by the blue stocking Dante societies of a few cities on the Atlantic coast, but also by the largest possible proportion of our ambitious youths, whether their aspirations be commercial, or scientific, or artistic.

To consider first the commercial side of the question:

Much has rightly been said about the study of certain foreign languages as instruments for obtaining our share of the world's trade after the war. Spanish merits our consideration, because it is the tongue of the vast empires of Argentine, Chile, and nearer at hand, Mexico. Portuguese is the tongue of the larger empire of Brazil, having an expanse almost as great as that of the United States and Alaska. As such, it deserves a place in the curricula of all our important commerce schools. However, let us not overlook the claims of Italian as a language to be possessed by the shrewd Yankee trader.

Italy is a first class power, with a rapidly growing population of nearly 40,000,000. Teeming with ambition to be at the forefront of the world's activities, she is rapidly changing from a purely agricultural to an agricultural-industrial country. How important has been the industrial expansion in Italy may be discerned from a few statistics, which are here quoted from *Italy To-day*, a fortnightly bulletin of the Italian Bureau of Public Information in the United States.

The present wealth of Italy is about 90,000,000,000 lire, or \$18,000,000,000.

From 1904 to 1911, the number of industrial enterprises in Italy increased from 117,341 to 243,926, or 107%.

Not only was there a gain in the number of the enterprises, but also in the importance of the undertakings, as is evinced by the fact that the horse-power employed increased from 734,272 in 1904 to 1,620,400 in 1911, or 120%.

In 1904, 1,215,109 Italians were employed in industrial undertakings. In 1911, the number had increased to 2,304,438, or 80%.

On account of the acute shortage of shipping tonnage in the world, it is worth while to note the surprising fact that Italy is a next door neighbor—comparatively speaking—being hardly more than one-half as remote as Chile or Argentina. A glance at the map, in fact, will remove many similar popular misconceptions regarding distances of foreign countries.

Heretofore, Italy has looked largely to Germany to supply not only her manufacturing materials, but also her banking facilities. The success of German traders in Italy was of course due, in no small degree, to the German thoroughness in mastering the Italian language. With the conclusion of peace, Italy will naturally look to her ally, the United States, rather than to Germany, for help. Here indeed is a wonderfully ripe field for American commercial genius.

There is another consideration which is perhaps more important than the commercial one. In the investigation of nearly every branch of the natural or social sciences, Italy will be found among the three or four leading nations. The American public is already familiar in a general way with the names of Marconi, the inventor of the wireless telegraph, and of Caproni, the inventor of the monster bombing biplanes. We have been informed that the Italians are among the foremost civil engineers. The Italian performance in building and maintaining roads in the Austro-Italian Alps, and in transporting supplies and ammunition across dizzy abysses, has been a source of constant wonder to us. We have also heard accounts of the great natural obstacles overcome by Italian tunnel diggers. We are doubtless more or less aware of the progress of Italians in medicine and bacteriology—of the experiments fathered by Grassi which led to the control of malaria not only in Italy, but also in the Panama Canal Zone. Names like those of Galileo, among astronomers, of Torricelli, Volta, and Galvani, among physicists, of Christopher Columbus, among explorers and discoverers, are quite as familiar to the American ear as those of the painters Giotto, Fra Angelico, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Correggio, and Titian, of sculptors like Michelangelo, of composers like Palestrina, Verdi, Rossini, Puccini, Mascagni, or of singers like Patti, Caruso, Galli-Curci and a host of others.

In view of the unquestioned scientific prestige of Italy—of her acknowledged supremacy in certain important branches of science

—it is very strange that American scholars have generally neglected the Italian language. It is the more regrettable because Italian shares with French and Spanish the advantage of being comparatively easy to read, while it is undoubtedly one of the least difficult languages for Americans to pronounce. A year or two spent in acquiring this beautiful tongue will bring far more satisfactory results than many years devoted to the study of certain other modern foreign languages.

Let us now review in a general way the situation in certain important branches of learning in which American investigators have been crippled because of a lack of knowledge of Italian.

First should be mentioned mathematics. In mathematical physics, and especially in geometry, Italy leads the world. Look for a moment, if you will, at the galaxy of the names of her investigators in these lines:

Bologna—Enriques and Pincherle.

Naples—Marcolongo and Pascal.

Padua—Levi-Civita, Ricci and Severi.

Pavia—Vivanti.

Pisa—Bianchi and Dini.

Rome—Castelnuovo and Volterra.

Turin—Boggio, Segre and Somigliana.

In Italy are published such important research journals as the *Annali di matematica*, the *Giornale di matematica*, the *Rendiconti del circolo matematico di Palermo*, the mathematical publications in the *Rendiconti* of the Lincei and of other learned societies.

After mathematics, let us consider chemistry. It is significant that Italy, which, like the United States, imported chemicals in vast quantities from Germany before the war, was able with wonderful quickness to produce at home, on a vast scale, everything necessary for the prosecution of chemical warfare. This fact may be better understood, if we glance for a moment at the past achievements of Italy in the field of chemistry. First to be mentioned is Avogadro, the discoverer of Avogadro's law, on which all present day molecular chemistry and physics are based. Then there is Cannizzaro, whose studies clarified the distinctions between atoms, molecules, and equivalents. Needless to observe, Italy has many modern representatives worthy of these illustrious pioneers. Suffice it to mention Cassuto, who has made notable

advances in the study of colloids; Bottazzi, who is an investigator of physiological and biological chemistry; Giolitti, who has made significant contributions to our knowledge of the composition of steels; and Vanino, originator of the best work on organic and inorganic preparations, for laboratory use and for manufacturing.

In Italy are published such indispensable chemical journals as the *Gazzetta Chimica Italiana*, ranking with the *Journal* of the American Chemical Society, as well as the publications of the learned societies of the Lincei, and many others. These important publications have been, for the most part, a closed book to American chemists, except in cases where German translations exist.

In the field of zoology and anatomy, the Italians stand very high indeed. The following is a partial list of Italian authorities along these lines:

- Bologna—Carlo Emery.
- Padua—Favaro.
- Bologna—Ghigi and Giacomini.
- Pisa—Romiti.
- Pavia—Golgi.
- Cagliari—Sterzi.
- Florence—Chiarugi and Giglioli (just deceased).
- Pisa—Ficalbi.
- Naples—Monticelli, Della Valle and Umberto.

To this list should be added such names as those of Berlese, the leading authority in the whole world on insects, and Grassi, one of the foremost investigators of all time along many lines, particularly in bacteriology.

Only passing mention will be made here of many other lines of investigation for which a knowledge of Italian is highly necessary, such as botany, physiology, and geology.

Let us now pass to the so-called social sciences, where the eminence of Italian scholars is well-known. It is sufficient to mention the names of the great Italian criminologists and sociologists—Lombroso, Ferri and Baron Garofalo; of the historians Ferrero and Villari; of the distinguished authorities on political science and public law, such as Brunialti, Minghetti, Brusa and Orlando; of the authorities on international law, such as Fiore, Carnazza-Amari, who are worthy modern successors of Gentili, one of the founders of the science, who ranks almost with Grotius.

In Italian are published a large number of journals on criminal law and criminology, on international law, in fact, on the whole field of social sciences.

If we now turn from practical to cultural considerations, we find the case for Italian even stronger, if anything. A beautiful language, practically every word ending in a vowel or a liquid, with no harsh consonant combinations, no outlandish vowel sounds, with a sonority and purity of tones which make it ideal for singing, it has been called with some justice "the logical universal language."

A knowledge of Italian enables the American tourist to travel and sojourn with pleasure in one of the most delightful countries in the world. As the author of one guide book rather enthusiastically expresses it: "All the time which is spent outside of Italy is time wasted." In Italy, the tourist really kills two birds with one stone, for he is privileged to see not only the many wonderful monuments of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance, and of later times, but also the ruins of ancient Rome, of the Greek colonies in Southern Italy, and even Etruscan ruins, going back to the fifteenth century before Christ.

Italian literature is one of the very richest in the world. What a roll-call of names is there! Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, Alfieri, Goldoni, Manzoni, Leopardi, Carducci! The greatness of Italian literature is evidenced by its tremendous influence on the literatures of other lands. Our own Chaucer was heavily indebted to Petrarch, and modeled his *Canterbury Tales* on the *Decameron* of Boccaccio. Shakespeare owed much of his best inspiration to the land of Romeo and Juliet. Milton steeped himself in the Italian poets, and made a journey to Italy, before seriously attempting to compose his *Paradise Lost*.

Of the three greatest names in German literature, two, Lessing and Goethe, are intimately connected with that of Italy. Indeed, it is well known that it was the *Italienische Reise*—the Italian journey—which was the crowning inspiration of the career of Goethe.

The question now arises: What should be the position of Italian in the high school curriculum? It is obvious that with French and Spanish vying with each other for the position lost by German, it will be difficult to make room for the teaching of Italian also. As a practical solution of the difficulty, I suggest that the

study of elementary Italian be made introductory to the study of elementary Latin. Excellent pedagogical reasons could be urged in favor of this step. To begin with the study of Latin, rather than of Italian, or of the language of some other modern Romance country which has to a large extent inherited the cultural traditions of classical Rome, is illogical when the relative difficulty of the languages concerned is considered. The impossibility of making Latin palatable to most youngsters is notorious. The numerous *Gates to Caesar*, and the like, which are found on the market, give evidence that our publishers, at least, recognize that the accepted method of learning Latin—first a year of grammar, then a year of the *Commentaries*—is preposterous.

Let it not be supposed that I am an enemy of the study of Latin. Quite the contrary. It is my belief that modern language instructors should make common cause with the devotees of the ancient languages to combat the ravages of an excessive materialism which is all too prevalent in our educational circles. But at the same time, the best service which could be rendered to the dead language is to teach it after an acquaintance has been made with its living representatives. The connection between French and Latin is not altogether obvious to the untrained mind, while the average student of Spanish is actuated more by hopes of fabulous profits to be gained in South American trade than by any purely cultural ambition. On the other hand, the study of Italian should make an ideal appeal to the student with humanistic leanings who formerly started his high school course with Latin.

Italy, of all the Romance countries, has been the one which has most steadfastly preserved the classical tradition. Through the ages, her men of letters have been conscious that Italy was, as it were, the modern continuation of ancient Rome. In the Middle Ages, this consciousness existed to an extent which actually retarded to a considerable degree the development of a literature in the vernacular. Hence it is not surprising to find that Petrarch, who is to-day best known for his Italian sonnets, was in his own day chiefly famous for his discoveries of old Latin manuscripts, of Quintilian and of Cicero. Boccaccio, now celebrated as the author of the *Decameron*, ruined himself financially to pay for the unearthing of ancient classical manuscripts, as well as for importing into Italy Greek editions of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey*. In our own

day, Pascoli is not only one of the leading Italian poets, but also a professor of Latin of no mean repute.

Because of this intimate connection between Italian literature and classical scholarship, as well as for purely linguistic reasons, such a book as the *Cuore* of De Amicis is the ideal first step towards the study of Caesar.

The cause of humanism will gain in another way from an early approach to the study of Italian. We are, all of us, too familiar with the narrowness of many American men of science, who can see no value in studies of a purely cultural value, or often as not, in anything outside of their peculiar specialty. By bringing Americans in contact with Italian scientists and the like, we introduce them to an entirely different sort of atmosphere. In Italy there still continues the tradition of Galileo, who was not only a mathematician and astronomer of the highest order, but also an enthusiastic lecturer on the great poets Dante and Tasso; of Leonardo da Vinci, physicist, inventor, painter, and man of letters. The universal love of the Italians for music, art and literature, especially poetry, has been the remark of nearly every traveler in Italy. This connection between the humanities and the sciences in Italy is recently illustrated in the career of the poet and novelist D'Annunzio, who has been most inventive in his methods of bombing the Austrians from the air.

Perhaps an even more striking illustration of the breadth of culture which has become traditional among Italian men of letters was Giosuè Carducci, who combined the scientific temperament with the vision of the poet. He was not only the foremost poet of modern Italy, but also a critic and scholar of the very highest order.

To sum up: The study of Italian in our high schools should be encouraged because of the growing importance of our trade with Italy, one of our natural commercial fields. Italian is a valuable tool for the student of the sciences, whether the natural sciences, like mathematical physics, chemistry, zoology, bacteriology, botany, etc., or the social sciences, like history, sociology, criminology and political science. It is a beautiful language, the ideal medium for music and poetry. Its literature ranks with the best in the world, not only in intrinsic merit, but also because of influence on most modern literatures. The logical time to begin its study is when the child is young, and can easily acquire a good

accent. He will thus have an ideal introduction to the study of Latin, which offers excessive difficulties to the young student, and the accent of which is a matter of minor importance.

The early study of Italian will be a gain for the cause of humanism, not only because such a procedure is the natural one pedagogically, but also because the student will thus be turned early to a civilization where the humanities are appreciated by all classes of society, by the materialistic scientist, as well as by the idealistic poet.

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